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ABSTRACT

Cross-crediting, or credit transfer, exists in Australia as a confused plethora of agreements in and amongst tertiary institutions. By and large the student is responsible for initiating or requesting credit for studies undertaken elsewhere, either in the past or concurrently. This study describes the development of an agreement on cross-crediting by five institutions of higher education which provides a model for collaboration in distance education, and suggests steps for its implementation. The agreement allows students to enroll concurrently in more than one institution and be given credit in advance for all academic work completed satisfactorily. The study effort began with historical and comparative analyses of information about current policies on inter-university enrollment. Next, an assessment of the general efficiency of these policies and the degree of existing or obtainable agreement among the institutions and their individual policies was performed. Following considerable correspondence and the circulation of several memoranda, including a draft memorandum of an agreement on cross-crediting, the representatives of the five participating universities reached agreement on principles and practices for cross-enrollment and cross-crediting. This report includes an executive summary of the study as well as a more detailed description of the methodology and findings, a discussion of the major issues involved, and strategies for further progress. References and copies of memoranda of agreement are appended. (Author/THC)

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Evaluative Study of Cross-Crediting Arrangements between Distance Education Universities

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February 1985

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APPENDIX C	Summary of Areas of Study from which Course Units would be Selected Under the Cross Enrolment Agreement.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is somewhat distinctive in being a trial of a project which involves five universities jointly and equally. Our first acknowledgement is therefore of the institutions which participated in the project - Deakin University, Macquarie University, Murdoch University, the University of New England and the University of Queensland.

More particularly, we would like to acknowledge the universities' directors of external studies - Professor J.D. Chick, the Director of the School of External Studies and Continuing Education of the University of Queensland; Mr. P. Guiton, the Director of External Studies of Murdoch University; Mr. J. Hall, the Director of the Centre for Evening and External Studies of Macquarie University; and Mr. K. Smith, the Director of External Studies of the University of New England. It was their initiative that laid the foundation for the project in the declaration of the "Toowoomba Accord" (with one of the authors, Mr. A.L. Pritchard, Registrar of Deakin University) on 11 July 1983. It was due to their commitment that a promising start materialised into the achievements reported in this study.

We would like to thank vice chancellors for responding positively to requests for their support. Professor F.R. Jevons, Vice Chancellor of Deakin University, Emeritus Professor E.C. Webb, Vice Chancellor of Macquarie University, Professor F.M.G. Willson, Vice Chancellor of Murdoch University, Professor R.C. Gates, Vice Chancellor of the University of New England; and Professor B.G. Wilson, Vice Chancellor of the University of Queensland. We also wish to thank our colleagues at Deakin University, the University of Melbourne and the University of New England for their assistance, but to absolve them of all responsibility for the opinions expressed.

Finally, we wish to record our thanks to the Evaluative Studies Steering Committee of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission for its support, and to the Committee's Executive Officer, Dr. A.P. Gallagher, for advice and assistance.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Preliminary

The difficulty of transferring credit between Australian universities has long been of concern to students, institutions, and the community. The issue was the subject of a recommendation by the CTEC Inquiry into the provision of External Studies, and has twice been considered by the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee during 1983/84. Progress toward cross-crediting agreements has been slow, with few signs of improvement.

Now the possibility of real progress with co-operative arrangements presents itself following two initiatives. Deakin and Murdoch universities and the University of Queensland have developed a joint Women's Studies proposal, which has involved agreement on credit transfer for courses forming part of the joint major. This proposal has given the universities a model for continued collaboration in distance education. This model was extended during discussions among representatives of the five universities at the ASPESA Forum (1983) and the following statement was endorsed.

> "The Directors of External Studies from the Universities of Queensland, New England, Macquarie and Murdoch and the Registrar of Deakin University met at Toowoomba on 11 July 1983.
>
> As means of reinforcing their shared commitment to increasing co-operation and in line with the recommendations of the Johnson Report to CTEC, they resolved to commend to their Vice Chancellors, individually and collectively, the idea of a consortium of external studies through which they would seek:
>
> 1. To facilitate student access to inter-university enrolment and individual external course units.
>
> 2. To explore possibilities for the establishment of a course combination drawn from a common pool.
>
> This recommendation stresses a wish to increase availability of external course choice for students. It does not seek to reduce the autonomy of any particular university nor to commit funds in advance of any specific plan for co-operative activity."

Since then the suggested initiatives have been well supported. Notably, there have been important discussions within and between universities on the first objective of the proposed consortium, the facilitation of student access to inter-university enrolment.

Introduction

CTEC, through its Evaluative Studies Steering Committee, awarded funds to Deakin University, acting on behalf of the five universities associated informally through the "Toowoomba Consortium", to evaluate the possibility of reaching a formal cross-crediting agreement between the universities associated in the consortium and to examine strategies for future collaborative arrangements.

The project was co-ordinated by a committee composed of members of the "Toowoomba Consortium", and involved the active participation of all five universities. Each university appointed a person familiar with course offerings and existing credit granting policies as liaison officer to work closely with the Chief Investigator. The Project Director was A.L. Pritchard, Registrar of Deakin University, and the Chief Investigator David R. Jones, then a Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.

It was realised early on that actually negotiating an agreement on cross-crediting would form the best test of the feasibility of this sort of co-operation; hence inquiry, preparation, discussion at many levels and negotiation towards this end formed the core of the study. The successes and failures of other instances of co-operation and collaboration, and the problems and prospects of future efforts, were also studied with the aim of providing useful information/recommendations on this and future projects. (The authors have found it useful to distinguish between co-operative and collaborative activities. The former are based principally upon awareness and recognition of one another's efforts, supported by intercourse and agreement; the latter on actual interchange and amalgamation of academic and administrative efforts, as in the case of a collectively planned and taught course or a shared facility.)

Methodology

The Project Director and the Chief Investigator began by acquiring analytical, historical and comparative information on the subject. This resulted in the preparation of a paper - Collaboration in Distance Education: Constraints, Co-operation and Cases - which was given by the Project Director at the Third International Meeting of University Administrators in Canada in July 1984. The Chief Investigator assembled information on current policies on inter-university enrolment and assessed their general efficiency and the degree of present or obtainable agreement among the institutions and their individual policies. The Chief Investigator then visited the five universities involved and discussed co-operation and collaboration in general, and cross-crediting in particular, with directors and staff of external studies departments, members of central administrations including the Vice Chancellors of Deakin and Murdoch and the Pro Vice Chancellor of New England, academics concerned with external studies, and librarians. After considerable further correspondence and the circulation and criticism of several memoranda including a draft memorandum of agreement on cross-crediting, the Project Co-ordinating Committee met with the Chief Investigator in attendance. APPENDICES A and B, represent the present state of discussion and tentative agreement among the participants.

Co-operation and Collaboration

Co-operation and collaboration among Australian universities are increasingly desirable for fiscal, intellectual, pedagogical, organisational, social, and political reasons. The primary desire of the universities covered by this study is to provide students with richer and more varied offerings than could be provided within the physical, fiscal, and intellectual limitations of any one institution.

Obstacles

Unfortunately, co-operation among Australian universities has always been constrained by several factors. The universities are physically remote from one another, and eighty-some years of federation has by no means entirely eliminated their socio-political separation, as is evidenced by the unusually strong tendency of Australian students to remain within their home states. Status differences which separate new and old institutions, while not nearly so strong as those separating university and non-university institutions, are still a significant problem. Traditions of academic freedom, institutional pride, etc., may all appear to be threatened by collaborative or co-operative activities. In sum, co-operation may appear attractive, but remains uncommon.

Inertia may be the most restrictive constraint upon co-operation and collaboration. Designing and implementing a program involves the creating or deepening of channels of communication, convincing or avoiding the indifferent, the doubtful, and the resistant, and designing, funding, and operating new activities and perhaps agencies. Successful co-operative activities thus require committed and active persons in positions of considerable influence or power, by no means a universal phenomena in universities.

Fortunately, distance education is well-equipped to overcome some of the barriers to inter-university co-operation. Distance educators are accustomed to collaborative activity within their own institutions. They are frequently required to demonstrate the quality and standards of their programs, and are thereby prepared to answer some of the most common questions asked about co-operative ventures by those concerned with, or even obsessed by, academic standards. Perhaps most important, distance educators and their institutions tend to be among the more innovative, dynamic, and less traditional parts of the Australian university system. The major efforts at co-operation and collaboration in distance education have been initiated and largely supported within the field. And, of course, the "directors of external studies" of the five major university providers of such studies initiated and continue to support the activities which have led to this report.

Cross Enrolment

The proposed agreement on cross-enrolment is evidence of this support. Briefly, the agreement will permit students who are currently pursuing a first degree in any of the five institutions, and who has successfully completed some units of course work in their "home" institution, to enrol for appropriate course units in any of the other four participating institutions, with the assurance that the successful completion of such units will be credited towards their degree from their home institution. From the institutional point of view the essence of the agreement is that such arrangements shall be mutually recognised and facilitated, and that each institution shall make places available to students of the other participants within the limits of the agreement and its resources. (Details of the agreement will be found in APPENDICES A and B.)

The institutions involved are prepared, in the short term, to accept the risk of any imbalances of trade; i.e. a situation in which an institution finds itself with substantially more or less course unit enrolments than would be the case if it enrolled only its own students. In fact, all the institutions hope that over a two or three year cycle the number of incoming and outgoing

students under the agreement will balance. The institutions and the relevant departments and staffs in particular have also been surprisingly willing to bear the inconveniences and likely expenses of administering and operating the agreed program on the small scale likely during the first, experimental years. Expansion and regularisation of the program will, however, require support in the forms of funds and organisational arrangements; recommendations are made below.

While the probability of reaching agreement on cross-crediting is encouraging, it does not indicate that other forms of co-operation, much less collaboration, will be easy to effect. Cross-crediting, as several universities have pointed out, will only involve the expansion, regularisation, and publicising of activities which are already under way on a smaller and ad hoc scale. Methods of assessing and crediting individual courses done outside the institution already exist. Furthermore it is in some senses both a peripheral and largely an administrative arrangement which does not threaten the position or demand extraordinary efforts from any individual or group. Academic collaboration, as in the case of the Womens' Studies major now offered by Deakin, Murdoch, and Queensland requires a far more complete meeting of academic minds, and must overcome all the traditional barriers of institutional, departmental, and individual academic independence. This requires both dynamic leadership on the part of a few and unusual receptivity on the part of others; this combination of conditions, particularly the latter, is seldom found in the long established areas of university endeavour. Attempts at which superficially appears to be collaboration often prove to be simply attempts to get some expensive or otherwise unavailable tuition provided at another institution's expense. Mere cost-cutting does not appear to be a sufficient stimulus to effective co-operation.

In the short term it seems likely that successful collaborative ventures will continue to be "one-offs", individually planned and negotiated by highly committed individuals or groups. In the longer term the general increase in academic intercourse and practice with administrative arrangements resulting from co-operation in cross-crediting will both encourage and simplify future collaboration. All recommendations on enhancing the efficiency and increasing the scope of cross-crediting and other forms of co-operation will also assist this more intimate and complex process. Participants in successful collaborative programs have rightly emphasised the need for meetings and their prohibitive cost in the absence of special provision for this expense of collaborative activity.

Strategies and Recommendations

The problems and promises of co-operation and collaboration may be usefully, though not entirely, divided into three areas: communication, facilitation and encouragement, and organisational and adminitrative arrangements.

Communication

1. The success of the cross-crediting project will depend heavily on good communications: careful and complete gathering of information, prompt dissemination, and clear and broad channels for rapid communication among the participating institutions. The administrative and clerical reasons for this are self-evident. No less important are the academic reasons: teachers must become

increasingly familiar with teaching outside their own universities if they are to accept the concept of co-operation and use it to enhance their students' experience of higher education. These needs will become more pressing as the numbers of courses and institutions involved in the program increase. Should co-operation extend beyond the university sector only very effective communications will serve to break down intersectoral suspicions and discrepancies concerning standards, purposes, etc.

As co-operative efforts in general, and cross-crediting in particular, expand, the costs of communications, information storage and retrieval, clerical activity, etc., will become very considerable. It also seems unlikely that the actual labour can be effectively shared by the participating institutions. The funds to acquire and operate high technology communication systems will eventually be required. And an agency to co-ordinate and/or perform such activities may be more effective than the necessarily fragmented effort of individual institutions. This is seen as a role for CTEC's Standing Committee on External Studies.

Encouragement

2. It has been shown that successful co-operation and collaboration require a combination of determined people and favourable circumstances. This need not be fortuitous. The academic world should be made aware of the fact that co-operation/collaboration are looked upon with favour and will be supported. Provision as in recommendation 1 and 3 will only produce more co-operation if it is well publicised, and if potential collaborations then receive the support required to meet, negotiate, etc. The disciplinary and professional associations which transcend individuals' institutions and perhaps receive greater loyalty, might provide an appropriate forum for both publicity and collaboration. The Commission might also be able to provide a forum in which institutions can share information and discuss progress.

Organisational Arrangements

3. The present fiscal and administrative relationships between universities and the Commonwealth are not designed to encourage or even take account of co-operative/collaborative activity. Enrolment quotas do not recognise the distinct nature of the student enrolled for cross-credit. Payment based on EFTSU figures cannot compensate a department for substantial expansion in the interests of cross-enrolled students. (This prevents the rationalisation which would result from one of a number of co-operating institutions concentrating in a particular subject to the exclusion of the others.) There is presently no effective way of calculating or recovering the costs in money and time of collaborative activities such as jointly planned and taught courses, etc.

Effective co-operation/collaboration will require recognition and flexibility in these areas on the part of CTEC.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STUDY

The obstacles to transferring credit between Australian universities have long been of concern to students and the community. More recently, the issue has been the subject of submission to the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission (CTEC) Evaluations and Investigations inquiry into the provision of external studies in Australian higher education (Moran & Charlesworth), and is the subject of recommendation by the inquiry (Johnson). It has also been considered by the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee on at least two occassions in 1983. Progress with the development of cross-crediting agreements has been slow, and the prospect of improved progress has until recently never seemed bright.

However, the possibility of real progress with co-operative arrangements presented itself following two initiatives. Deakin and Murdoch universities and the University of Queensland developed a joint Women's Studies proposal, which, among other things, involved agreement on credit transfer for courses forming part of the joint major. Progress with this proposal gave the universities a model for continued collaboration in distance education. This model was extended during discussions between representatives of the five universities at a recent conference of the Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association (ASPESA) in 1983. That conference was held at Toowoomba, Queensland, and a joint communique following the conference, now known as the "Toowoomba Accord" was adopted as a common article of faith; given the importance of the statement to the present study, it is worth setting out in full.

> "The Directors of external study from the universities of Queensland, New England, Macquarie, and Murdoch and the Registrar of Deakin University met at Toowoomba on 11 July 1983.
>
> As a means of reinforcing their shared commitment to increasing co-operation and in line with the recommendations of the Johnson report to the CTEC, they resolved to commend to their Vice-Chancellors, individually and collectively, the idea of a consortium of external studies through which they would seek:-
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> ii) to explore possibilities for the establishment of course combinations drawn from a common pool.
>
> This recommendation stresses a wish to increase availability of external course choice for students. It does not seek to reduce the autonomy of any participant university nor to commit funds in advance of any specific plan for co-operative activity."

This commitment appeared to lay the foundation for a response to Professor Johnson's challenge:

> "Were I the enterprising head of an enterprising institution I would consider convening a small working party from a few major providers to prepare detailed recommendations..."
>
> (Johnson, 1983, p.34)

The difficulties facing such an approach were later expressed graphically by Emeritus Professor A.H. Willis in his report of a CTEC Evaluations and Investigations inquiry into the impact of technology on the teaching process in Australian universities.

> "The subject of co-ordination and co-operation in the provision of external studies, and the possibility of improvement in those respects, have been discussed by Johnson (82). I can only add my opinion that, in the main, external studies is limping along much as it has always done, and that, without a national initiative of an appropriate kind, there will continue to be talk, without matching achievement, about how much a country like Australia needs a comprehensive range of external studies, and how easily technology could make it possible".
>
> (Willis, 1983, p.57)

Nevertheless, progress "after Toowoomba" was promising, and CTEC's Evaluative Studies Steering Committee expressed interest in supporting a study of cross-crediting. On 24 May 1984 the Steering Committee adopted a revised proposal for an evaluative study of cross-crediting arrangements between distance education institutions, providing $16,519 towards the cost of the study. The balance of the cost of the study, estimated to be not less than $10,000 was provided by the participating institutions.

OBJECTIVES

The goals agreed in the Toowoomba Accord were to facilitate student access to inter-university enrolments, and to explore possibilities for the establishment of course combinations drawn from a common pool. These goals were expanded to four objectives for the study.

Investigation of problems

1. To investigate issues involved in facilitating student access to inter-university enrolment in individual external course units and in establishing a framework for enrolment in course combinations drawn from a common pool.

Development of solutions

2. To develop proposals to facilitate student access to inter-university enrolment, for example by concurrent enrolments, the award of credit for admission ad eundem statum and the introduction of a formal cross-crediting agreement between the universities.

Implementation

3. (a) To negotiate consensus on policies and procedures for facilitating student access to inter-university enrolment;

(b) To prepare a compendium of distance education courses offered by the participating universities, with a view to the universities' joint publication of the compendium.

Evaluation

4. To evaluate and report on:

(a) the negotiation of consensus on policies and procedures for facilitating student access to inter-university enrolment;

(b) the possibility of the participating universities publishing jointly a compendium of their courses offered by distance education;

(c) the possibility of establishing course combinations drawn from a common pool.

METHODOLOGY

The Investigator determined that the project was essentially a feasibility study of a specific proposal. This distinguished it from other studies which have been reviews of existing activities or investigations conducted along the lines of research projects (Morrison, 28 June 1984). The project was also distinctive in being a joint project, involving five institutions as equal participants.

It was therefore decided to continue and to some extent formalise an understanding that had been reached in establishing the joint project. That is, it was decided that at every stage agreement would be sought by consensus of the institutions, and that each university would be involved as direct participants in the study.

This led to the involvement of institutions at two levels. Co-ordination of the project was the responsibility of a Co-ordinating Committee comprising the directors of external studies of the participating institutions (the "Toowoomba group") -

Professor J.D. Chick	Director of External Studies and Continuing Education University of Queensland
Mr. P. Guiton	Director of External Studies Murdoch University
Mr. J. Hall	Director Centre for Evening and External Studies Macquarie University
Mr. A.L. Pritchard	Registrar Deakin University
Mr. K. Smith	Director of External Studies University of New England

As initiator of the study, Mr. A.L. Pritchard was appointed Project Director.

At the investigation and implementation level, each University appointed a liaison officer for the project a person who has normally directly involved in student admissions. The liaison officers were:

Deakin University	Mr. R.G. Burrows Assistant Registrar (Student Services)
Macquarie University	Ms. J. Dettman Assistant Registrar
Murdoch University	Mr. R.N. MacWilliam Deputy Secretary (Academic)
University of New England	Mr. D. Williams Academic Secretary
University of Queensland	Mr. L. Page Assistant Registrar

Dr. D.R. Jones, then research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education of the University of Melbourne, was appointed Chief Investigator.

The study took the form of an involved process of information sharing, discussion and negotiation. The process commenced with a collection of information of each university's policies and practices on inter-university enrolment. The Chief Investigator then visited each institution to discuss with liaison officers and others the possibilities for establishing a joint university agreement on cross enrolment.

The final negotiating stage involved the Chief Investigator, Program Director, Co-ordinating Committee and Liaison Officers. While the groundwork for this negotiation had been laid in the previous information sharing and discussions, there were nevertheless several points of substance that required resolution before agreement was reached. The results of this negotiation are set out in APPENDIX A - Draft Memorandum of Agreement on Cross Enrolment, APPENDIX B - Notes to Accompany the Memorandum of Agreement on Cross Enrolment, and APPENDIX C - Summary of Areas of Study from which Course Units would be Selected Under the Cross Enrolment Agreement.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MAJOR ISSUES

INVESTIGATION OF PROBLEMS

The most obvious constraint upon co-operation is geography. The original universities of each Australian state/colony were widely separated and communications were slow and expensive. They remain expensive.

Political geography perhaps was, and perhaps remains, even more important. Until the 20th Century the various Australian colonies were legally and practically independent, united only in their subordination to the imperial power. Inter-colonial rivalries existed in economic, social-cultural, and physchological spheres, marked by tarrif barriers and disparate rail gauges, convictions of superior taste, culture, morality, etc., and a fixed determination to demonstrate both independence and parity in all the marks of advancing civilization, including cultural institutions such as libraries, museums, and universities. Furthermore, for both political and practical reasons, lies to "home" (i.e. Great Britain) were often stronger than those among neighbouring states, and certainly far stronger than those between the East and West coasts or between Queensland and South Australia or Tasmania. Individual Australian universities had far closer links with particular British universities than with one another, as did colonial/state professional associations and other relevant organisations.

Federation produced surprisingly little change in the circumstances of education, as powers in this area were left, by default, to the individual states. Only slowly, and to a very limited extent, did the Commonwealth make use of indirect influence, inherent in its right to grant money, as a means of affecting higher education. The first effective co-ordinating body, the Australian Universities Commission, was only established in 1959; based on the model of the British Universities Grants Commission, it was unlikely to require any significant change in universities' arrangements and attitudes. While increasing (or, recently, even stagnating or decreasing) funds have been accompanied by greater Federal control, universities are statutorily controlled by the individual states, which also disburse the federal funds which form the bulk of their budgets.

This continued separateness is demonstrated by the habits of students. Unlike students in many other countries, the Australian student is almost entirely non-migratory; even the minority who come from the sparsely populated countryside usually attend the urban institutions of their own state. This situation is both reflected and encouraged by the very limited provision of student residential accommodation. Indeed, it is impossible to entirely separate cause and effect in the relationship between student habits and the unco-ordinated independence of Australian universities.

The appearance in recent years of more universities in each state might have been expected to increase intra-state, if not inter-state, co-operation. This has happened to some extent, but within very limited parameters. While considerations of prestige and status are not always easy to describe, much less measure, it is clear that the assertion of superiority by the "established" university of each state, and the reactions of its younger brethren, have limited co-operation. New institutions seeking support, students, and a raison d'etre have been innovative in matters of curriculum, organisation, etc., making their style and "standards" suspect in the eyes of the senior institutions. And, of course, they have competed for funds.

The British inheritance has made Australian universities notably independent and in some ways rather inflexible and unaccommodating institutions. The "maintenance of standards", that bugbear of the British and many other systems of higher education, coupled with independence and a sense of institutional hierarchy and competition, ensures that each university will treasure the unique value of its courses and certification, and be reluctant to acknowledge parity, much less compatibility or interchangeability, with the work of other institutions. New courses and programs often require approval at several intra-institutional and even inter-institutional levels. While this accustoms people to weighing and defining courses, a necessary prerequisite for collaboration, it also produces defensive attitudes and enhances the dangers of innovation.

One mechanism used by the British to "maintain standards" which does encourage, and even require, co-ordination (and imply interchangeability and parity) has been eliminated in the Australian situation. A system of external examiners would have provided regular contacts, familiarity with other institutions, and established mechanisms for assessing comparability of activities. (At the expense, of course, of variety, flexibility, and originality, not to mention the fiscal expense.) Unlike many ex-colonies, Australian universities cannot look back (whether fondly or the reverse) to a period when they were united either by subordination to London and its external degrees, or through a federal university as in New Zealand.

Differences of style in a system where other institutions still sometimes look longingly toward Oxbridge while others look to newer or even "foreign" models exacerbate the difficulties of collaboration even within the relatively homogeneous university sector. As for inter-sectoral collaboration, it has largely been a matter of forced marriage, with government holding the shotgun.

In educational affairs, as elsewhere, co-operation is always well spoken of. It forms the substance of many speeches but of few programs. Its attractions are obvious, perhaps especially under Australian circumstances. Unfortunately, the hindrances are at least equally prominent. The result, to date, is a sharply divided system of post-compulsory education, with substantial barriers to co-operation. Collaboration, then is an attractive policy but an uncommon reality. The disjunction is not entirely a result of the external constraints discussed above; it is partly a failure of the implementation process.

Pressman and Wildavsky have provided a useful catalogue of the likely slips "twixt cup and lip". Several preconditions will facilitate the implementation of a policy/program. There should be no great conflicts among the participants, and general agreement on the desirability of the program. There should be little publicity, and the issue should not be of overriding political importance. And, of course, funds must be available.

Then there are the human and technical problems of implementation. The technical problems, and solutions, are at least easily stated: difficulties increase with the increase of the number of clearances and decision points required, and with the number of actors required to make these decisions and to grant clearances. There is delay regardless of the participants' attitudes, and an ever increasing chance of including unwilling participants and receiving negative response. The solution: reduce the length and complexity of the path, a solution which can be applied not only to the implementation of the overall program, but to the method of regularly performing whatever tasks are intended. However, reduction must not come at the expense of the amount of consultation and participation necessary to develop and maintain the agreement of all interested parties.

The last sentence suggests the complexity of the human problems. People may flatly disapprove of collaboration as expensive, unnecessary, or a threat to the status, power, or standards of institutions, programs, or individuals. Even if the theoretical popularity of collaboration is generalised among participants there remain plenty of "...reasons why participants may agree with the substantive ends of a proposal and still oppose (or merely fail to facilitate) the means of effectuating it." (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973, pp.99-101)

1. They may prefer or be committed to other projects which require their time and attention. This problem is inherent in efforts at collaboration which do not unite all the purposes and activities of participants.

2. Persons whose authority or expertise are needed "may lack a sense of urgency about the overall program". Complex systems for the accrediting and approval of new academic programs tend to produce this difficulty.

3. "Participants who agree about a program's goals may nevertheless disagree about which people or organisational units should be running the programs." This is particularly true in academic affairs where co-ordination may threaten the treasured autonomy of every organisational level from individual to institution.

4. "Agreement coupled with lack of power. Certain participants may agree enthusiastically with a proposal, but they may lack the resources to do much to help it." This problem may particularly affect areas, like distance education, which are sometimes seen as peripheral to traditional and prestigious institutions' purposes.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOLUTIONS

Distance education is peculiarly well equipped to overcome some of the constraints on inter-university co-operation in Australia. Its very nature, and the techniques it has developed, help to overcome geographical barriers. The general familiarity with pedagogical, and even interpersonal, relations at a distance, is perhaps as important as specific techniques of communication like tele-conferences, broadcasting, etc. While distance education alone is probably not capable of breaking the geopolitical boundaries which divide higher education, it at least disturbs the insular concentration upon the metropolitan capital of each state.

Distance educators are usually familiar with collaboration and sympathetic toward co-operative ventures. Work on course teams, and with the technical and support services necessary in distance education has given them an experience of collective activity unusual among academics. The low status often accorded to distance education has made its practitioners experts at establishing and maintaining positions by diplomatic means; these can surely be applied to extra-mural relations. Questions of quality and standards, as well as status, bedevil distance education. The resulting emphases on careful evaluation and detailed representation and justification should allow distance educators to bring useful information and skills to the problems of comparability and compatibility in collaborative efforts. Co-operation

should also be encouraged by distance education's increased attention to learning as distinct from teaching. Given the in some ways passive role of a supplier of knowledge, the distance educator's ego may not be too bound up with the unique nature of his contribution to the education process.

The major institutional providers of distance education are relatively well suited and perhaps sympathetic to co-operative ventures. Most of them are not the "senior" institution in their respective states, and often they have sought to attract attention, funds, and status by means of innovative offerings. While very concerned about standards, and particularly their comparability with those of older institutions, they may well find collaboration a means of increasing and enhancing their offerings to compete effectively with larger universities. It is also plausible to hope that, aware of their "inferior" status in respective state and collective federal hierarchies, the distance education institutions may be sympathetic to one another. And at least the staff of these institutions are at worst inured to, and at best enthusiastic about, innovations in general.

The study therefore found that it would be feasible to propose a development from the current co-operative activites, which are based on an awareness and recognition of each institution's individual efforts, to a level of collaborative activities involving collective effort based on shared capacities. Such collaboration may take many forms, but it became apparent early in the study that the negotiation of an agreement on cross-crediting would be the best test of the extent of collaboration feasible, and establish a secure basis for the development of further collaboration.

IMPLEMENTATION

The first step in implementing cross-crediting collaboration was the negotiation of a formal agreement. Indeed, the inquiry, preparation, discussion and negotiation of the Agreement forming APPENDIX A constituted the core of the study.

The Agreement starts with the concepts of "host" institution and "home" institution. The host institution is the institution making its units available to students registered for the award of a degree at another institution. The home institution is the institution at which the student is enrolled for a degree.

Although the Agreement expressly avoids statements of policies or expectations, there were three principles which guided the drafting of the Agreement.

First, the student interest is taken as paramount, and arrangements should maximise benefits to students. Thus, students should have only one contact point for all administrative matters. The home university handles all enrolments, variations, withdrawals, changes of address, etc., even though some of these might be relevant only to the host university, and it would be more convenient for the institutions to impose the communication-liaison burden on the student.

The second principal is institutional autonomy, in both academic and administrative matters. The Agreement covers only those areas where the participating institutions must act collectively or in one another's best interests. For example, each institution handles differently the possibility of on campus "internal" students enrolling for off campus "external" units. The Agreement provides for the incorporation of "local rules" to handle such variations in practice at the institutional level.

The third principle, that each institution is treated as an equal and joint participant, is so basic that it might almost go without saying. But given the high visibility of the distinctiveness and differences between each institution, it is necessary to establish explicitly that the basis for collaboration is joint and equal responsibility, not some assumed or inherited hierarchy.

The second step in implementing cross-crediting collaboration was the collection and collation of course units considered for inclusion under the cross enrolment agreement. A summary of "areas of study" from which courses would be ultimately selected is given in APPENDIX C of this report.

In considering the range of courses, several related issues should be distinguished. The award of credit to a student for studies at another institution, whether retrospectively in the case of admission ad eundem statum or prospectively as envisaged in the present cross enrolment study, involves questions of the course units' quality, congruity with other course units, compatibility with other course units, and consistency with degree requirements. Each of these questions is considered.

A course unit's quality depends primarily on the level of its demands - how difficult or challenging it is, and the extent of its demands - the workload involved. But also involved are subsidiary questions of how it is assessed, the pedagogical quality of its presentation and the level of resources such as library holdings available to support the study. In short, all that is involved in that complex bundle of ideas and pretentions described as "academic standards". In considering courses to be included in a compendium, all institutions are expressly precluded from making or assuming any distinction on the grounds of quality. A fundamental working premise (though no one accepts it uncritically) is that for all relevant purposes, the quality of all courses in the compendium is homogeneous.

While no institution may reject another's course on the grounds of quality, each institution will want to assess the congruity of other institutions' offerings with their own. Thus, institutions will want to exclude some courses from the list of those available to their students on the grounds of a significant overlap of material with their own courses. That is normal and accepted practice within institutions, where such overlaps are often designated as "prescribed combinations". This assessment is a necessary aspect of cross enrolments between institutions.

A more difficult question is raised by an assessment of compatibility. No doubt all academic disciplines have a diversity of ideological approaches and methodologies. However, there are some disciplines where ideologies or methodologies are so different as to be incompatible, and there is sharp disagreement within the discipline over the validity of mutually exclusive approaches. In these disciplines, scholars from one school of thought may reject entirely courses offered by another school, notwithstanding an absence of an overlap of content. Such disagreements are an inevitable and perhaps desirable stage in the evolution of a discipline, and are therefore accommodated in the Agreement on Cross Enrolment.

Finally, an assessment of a course unit's consistency with the home institution's degree requirements is a familiar and uncontentious aspect of course approval. This assessment is normally made individually for each student each time they enrol or vary their enrolment.

EVALUATION

Consensus has been reached on the principles of the Agreement on Cross Enrolment, and this is evidence of the efficacy and strength of the support of the "Toowoomba group" for this form of collaboration. The authors expect that this consensus will, in due course, result in formal adoption of the Agreement by each of the participating institutions. Negotiations towards this end are proceeding. It is likely that institutions will require minor modifications of the Agreement for formal adoption to take place, but it was decided not to delay this report for the final form of the Agreement.

Adoption of the Agreement will permit a student who is currently pursuing a first degree in any of the five institutions, and who has successfully completed some units of coursework in their "home" institution, to enrol for appropriate course units in any of the other four participating institutions, with the assurance that the successful completion of such units will be credited towards their degree at their home institution. The Agreement provides for the removal of many of the tiresome procedural and administrative obstacles to cross enrolment currently faced by students.

For a number of reasons the possibility of the participating institutions publishing jointly a compendium of their courses seems remote in the short term. The sheer logistics are daunting: there are over 750 courses involved, and the volume of material would be almost unmanageable. The institutions are currently considering the compilation of a list of courses showing simply their code, title, offer period, credit weighting and prerequisites. This appears far more achievable in the short term than a full compendium. A further step might be to compile compendiums for selected discipline areas.

There are two major obstacles to establishing a common pool of course combinations. One difficulty is the risk that there may be serious disparities between the number of students of each institution who wish to enrol in another's courses (the number of EFTSU "exported") and the number of students which each institution hosts (the number of EFTSU "imported"). For the time being, the institutions have accepted the risk of short term "imbalances of trade" in the expectation that parity will be achieved in the longer term. This expectation may prove to be mistaken, in which case the Agreement will be placed under some strain.

A second obstacle to establishing a common pool of course offerings is the rigid application of enrolment quotas. Institutional enrolment targets, and the resulting intra-institutional quotas, present the most serious threats to the cross enrolment Agreement. At the time of writing, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission is adopting a reasonably permissive attitude to small over enrolments, no doubt in response to Government policy to increase

the number of higher education places available to prospective students. Needless to say, over enrolments are not matched by corresponding increases in funding, and are supported by the commitment of each institution. A return to the Commission enrolment policy of a few years ago, or a reduction in the financial and policy commitment of the participating institutions, will bring the Agreement to an abrupt end. As circumstances currently stand, the prospect of establishing course combinations drawn from a common pool is problematical.

CHAPTER THREE: STRATEGIES FOR FURTHER PROGRESS

COMMUNICATIONS

The history of distance education could largely be written as a history of the application of communications to education. Inter-institutional collaboration in distance education would in this history be an account of how the techniques used by institutions to communicate with students are applied to the task of communicating with other institutions. Thus, the success of the cross-crediting project will depend heavily on good communications: careful and complete gathering of information, prompt dissemination, and clear and broad channels for rapid communication among participating institutions.

The administrative and clerical reasons for this are self-evident. No less important are the academic reasons: teachers must become increasingly familiar with teaching outside their own universities if they are to accept the concept of co-operation and use it to enhance their students' experience of higher education. These needs will become more pressing as the numbers of courses and institutions involved in the program increase.

It is reasonable to suppose that the next major steps in inter-institutional collaboration - increasing the number of collaborating institutions, and broadening the range of joint activities - will result from the application of new communication techniques. Much has been made recently of the educational possibilities of the new information technologies, and in particular, the idea of "the electronic university" has had some vogue. Irrespective of whether these advances will be achieved in the precise form in which they are currently envisaged, there seems little doubt that the new information technologies will offer important opportunities - and challenges - to distance education institutions.

The significance of these developments may be illustrated diagrammatically. The conventional communication flows between universities and their students is shown in Figure 1. The cross-crediting project has established a communications pattern illustrated in Figure 2 - each university communicates with all other universities about its "home" students. However, if the number of participating institutions is to grow to more than a handful, and the range of joint activities is to increase, a different communications model will be required.

An example of a communications model made possible by new technologies is shown in Figure 3. Here each university passes information through a node accessable to all other participating institutions. In this model communications between each institution will be quick (in "real time"), comprehensive, and will involve only one transaction to convey or receive messages from all other institutions. Given the complexity of the operation, they will be relatively inexpensive. This is made possible by the interaction of several likely developments. Telecom's recent introduction of Austpac, the universities' forthcoming installation of Local Area Networks, and the increasing dp "decentralisation", or availability of data processing capacity in user areas. The conceptual tool that makes this possible is the notion of "distributed processing".

It is not the purpose of this study to consider the many possible applications of new technologies to universities - this has been attempted in a previous CTEC study (Willis, 1983). However, it is necessary to draw attention to the special importance of technological developments for collaborative projects.

A feature of these developments is the establishment of communications facilities and protocols which will be common to all participating institutions - Telecom's Austpac is the example currently in place, but it is only the beginning. These are described in Figure 3 as a joint communications node. The constitution of this node is, of course, yet to be determined. But because it exists outside each of the participating institutions, it is an area that reasonably concerns a co-ordinating authority.

ENCOURAGEMENT

There is little doubt that CTEC's encouragement of inter-institutional collaboration has been an important element in the success of the cross enrolment project. It is highly probable that continuing encouragement from CTEC will be necessary to maintain the collaborative impetus. Thus far the Commission's involvement has, probably out of necessity, been somewhat distant. Yet there are several instances where the Commission could usefully have a closer involvement.

For example, much of the time in the current project was spent in filling the role of honest broker. This seems to be a role which the Commission might be well placed to accept in future. The Commission might also be able to provide a forum in which institutions can share information and discuss progress.

Another forum for both publicity and collaboration may be provided by the disciplinary and professional associations which transcend individuals' institutions and perhaps receive greater loyalty. In another context the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) suggested that the co-ordination of professional activities might be attempted through national and regional special interest groups formed under the auspices of the Australian Institute of Tertiary Educational Administrators (AITEA). Indeed the Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association (ASPESA) conferences have already been occasions for informal discussions on matters of joint interest, these suggestions and early but promising starts might be pursued, and to some extent formalisted.

ORGANISATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

In an article discussing the impact of new technology on higher education, Bates argues that the technology, by and large, is not the problem (Bates, 1984). He argues that "the main barrier is the inability of large institutions to carry through the fundamental changes in organisation, financial arrangements and teaching strategies that are essential if flexible off campus teaching is to be achieved". Much the same could be said of the long term prospects of major collaborative projects.

But the organisational rigidities inhibiting desirable developments are by no means exclusively internal to the institutions. In considering technology's challenge to education, Coleman and Joseph argue that the "enrolment economy" within which institutions operate impose reverse limitations on their capacity to respond to community needs. (Coleman and Joseph 1984.) The present study has found similar results, with the universities attracting high student demand being particularly restricted by the pressures on CTEC imposed enrolment quotas.

There seems little prospect of removing this difficulty without some change in attitude from the Commission. An unreal level of alturism is demanded of institutions if the only way they can achieve sufficient quota flexibility to provide for cross-institutional enrolments is by cutting existing quotas in areas of strong student demand.

Furthermore, while the Commission asserts that universities are not funded solely according to a formula driven by student enrolments, the Commission has been unwilling to disclose in sufficient detail the basis on which it does allocate funds. Lacking any better information, institutions are forced to assume that student enrolments are signficant in determining funding - they are certainly a significant cost component - and act accordingly. They are therefore hesitant about the prospect of student enrolment gains through cross enrolment arrangements, because additional funding will not necessarily be provided to support the additional cost. Conversely, institutions fear student enrolment losses through cross enrolments, because they might thereby erode their resource bases.

CONTINUING THE PROJECT

The major thrust of this Chapter is that the establishment, maintenance and extension of collaborative projects in distance education are the dual responsibilitites of the institutions involved and the appropriate co-ordinating authority, in this case, CTEC. This report chronicles the Commission's initial stimulation of joint projects, the institutions first response with the 'Toowoomba Accord' and fuller response with a proposal for an evaluative study of cross crediting arrangements, the Commission's support through the Evaluative Studies Steering Committee, and institutions' progress with an Agreement on cross crediting.

Co-operation and collaboration could be furthered in many ways by an agency able both to act independently and to make recommendations to CTEC on policy and disbursement. Co-operation would be greatly facilitated by the centralised collection, storage, and dissemination of information on courses, enrolments, qualifications, co-operative programs, etc. The compilation and dissemination by print or electronic means of a directory or handbook of external studies offerings would be most desirable. Even if the agency does not itself evaluate the standards or comparability of courses, it might usefully record the decisions made in this area by educational institutions, thus increasing effeciency in credit and enrolment transfers. It could act as a channel of communication by publishing a newsletter, publicising initiatives in co-operation, and encouraging meetings and conferences of distance education. Its position of independence and expertise might also allow it to act as an "honest broker" in negotiations on co-operation and collaboration.

Such an agency should be able to disburse modest sums to encourage efforts at co-operation through subvention of conference and meeting costs, the "starting-up" costs of small programs, etc. It should also become a regular and respected advisor to CTEC on the allocation of funds and construction of policies to further co-operation and collaboration. Any major collaborative enterprises such as the joint establishment of new degree courses, creation of shared teaching or resource facilities, etc., will require substantial funds; proposals might well be vetted and appropriate expenditure recommended by the proposed agency.

A body now exists that could take on the roles suggested in the previous paragraphs for the agency to foster co-operation and collaboration. It is CTEC's Standing Committee on External Studies. It is suggested that as a first step this report and the Commission's responses to it might be referred for consideration by the Standing Committee.

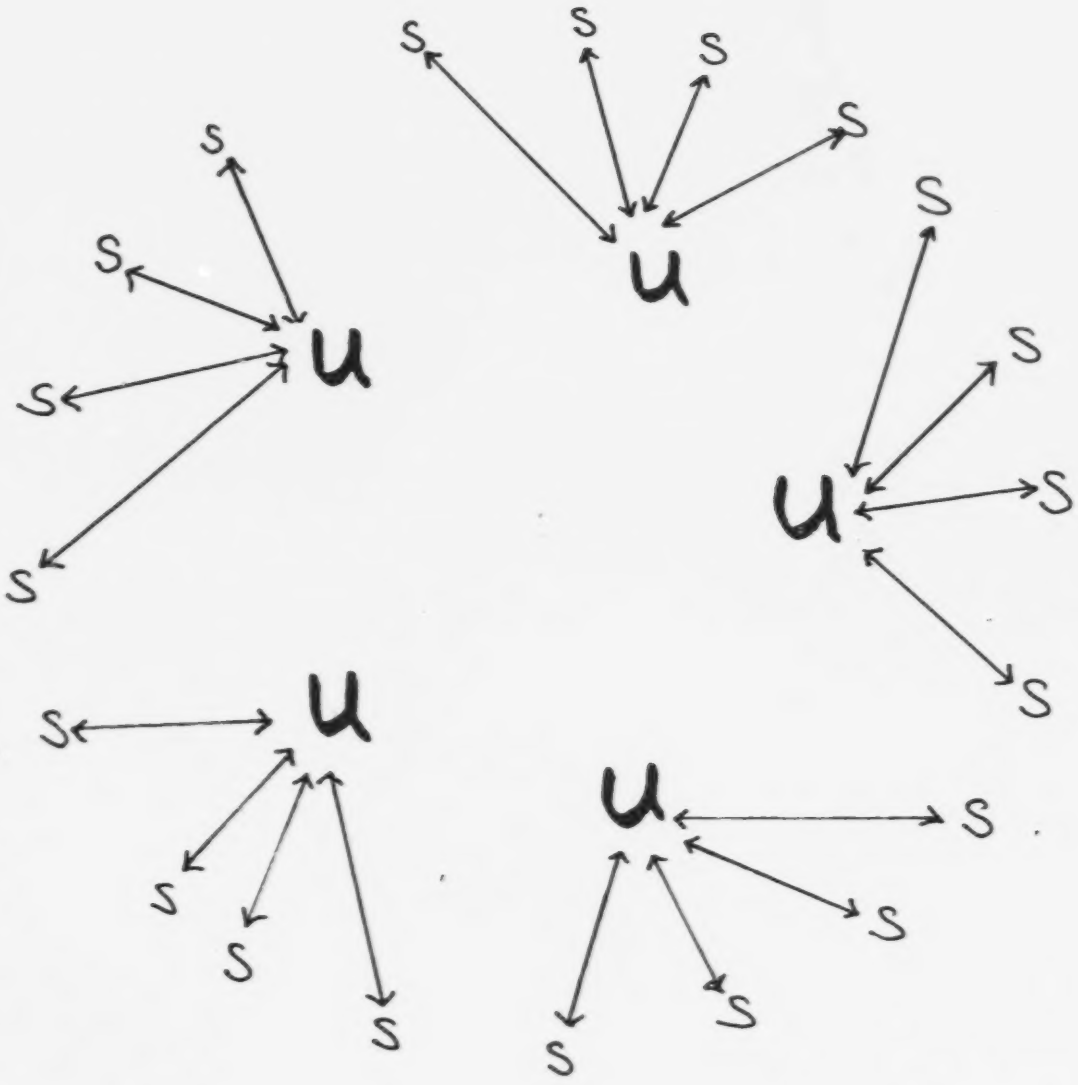

FIGURE 1

Universities communicate separately to their students.

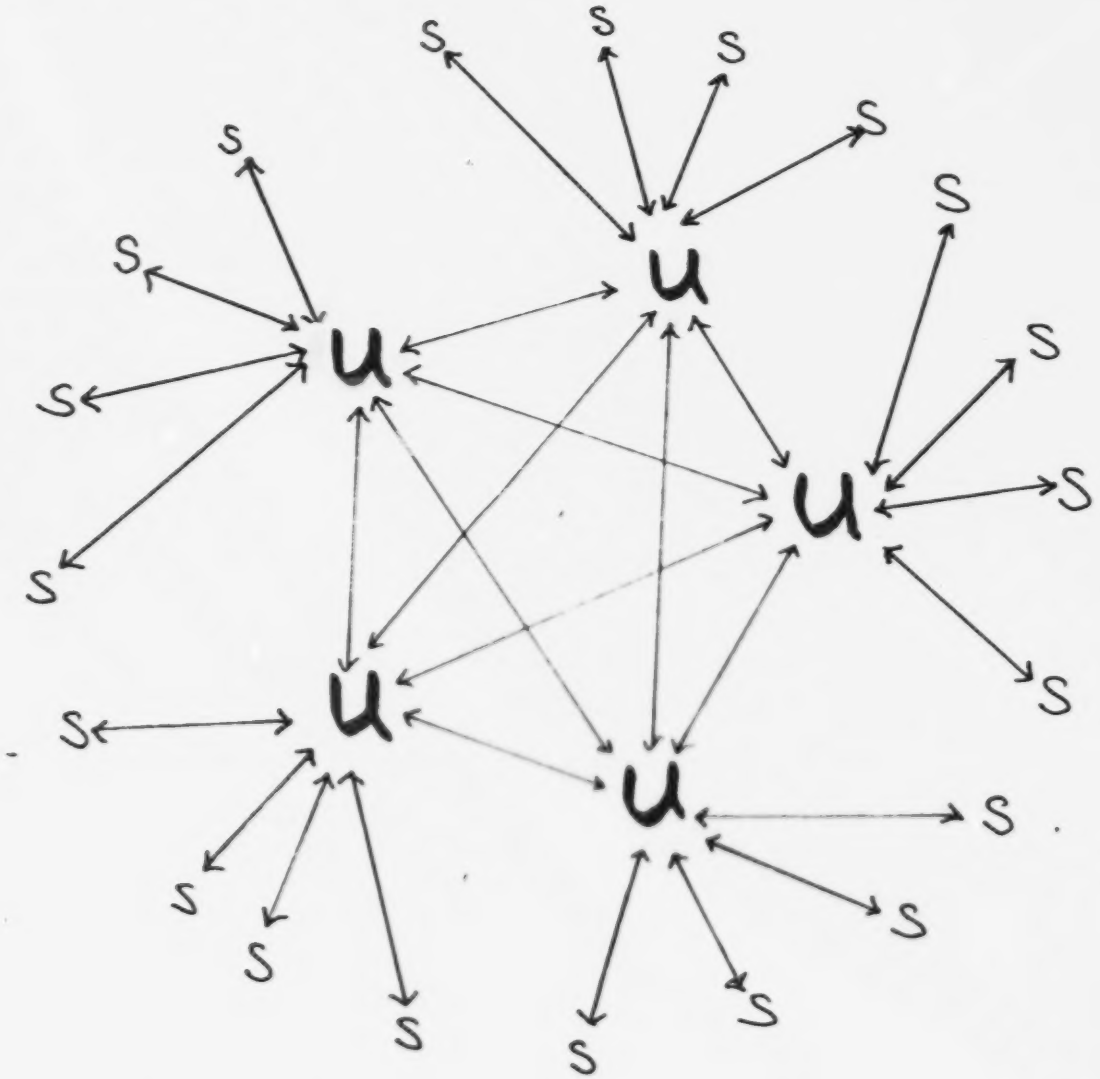

FIGURE 2

Universities communicate information on 'home' students to 'host' institutions.

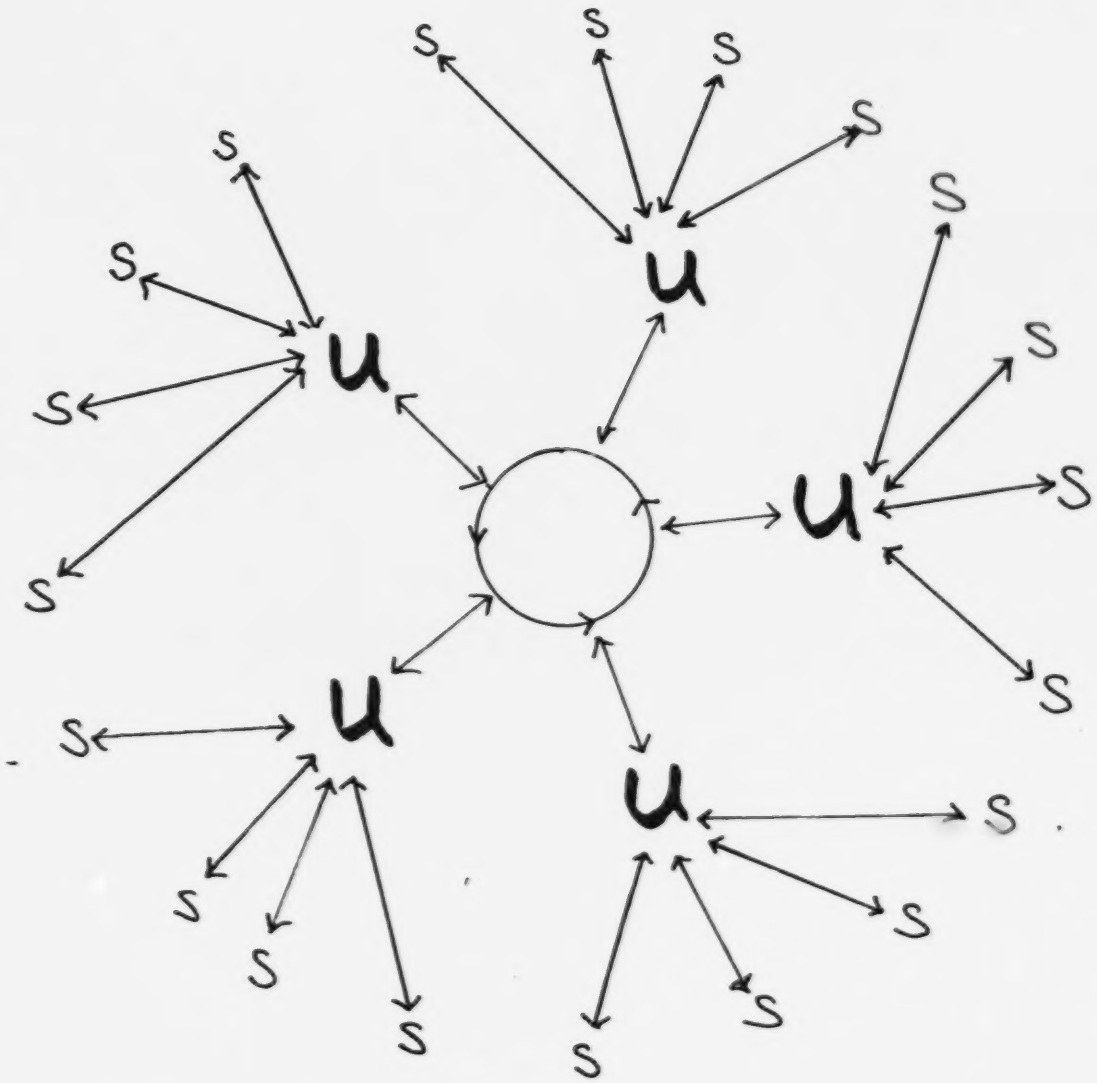

FIGURE 3

A joint communications node.

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MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT ON CROSS ENROLMENT

Queensland, New England, Murdoch, Macquarie and Deakin Universities agree to make a range of their externally taught undergraduate course units available to students of the five institutions. The arrangements and conditions for 1986 will be as follows:

Role of Unit Provider (Host)

1. Units which are already over subscribed within the host university will not be made available. In all other units quotas will be allocated to each of the participating universities, to prevent over-enrolment in units and to control overall student load. During the enrolment process, unused quota places at one institution may be redistributed to other institutions.

2. The five universities will collectively prepare information and procedures for students and prepare a list of all available units, their quotas, conditions for entry and unit weight and make this information available to each institution.

   (Note: 1 & 2, which must be performed on an annual basis, will require supervision, time and funds, and, if they are to be expanded to more units and/or other institutions will certainly require the use of advanced communication/information storage devices, a development desired by all participants.)

3. The host university will register students under the agreement. From that time on the student will be treated by the host exactly as if the student were a home student; the host will teach, provide course materials, academic services, hear any appeals on assessments, etc. and provide a transcript of academic results to individual students and "home" universities.

Role of Degree Granting (Home) Institution

4. Each university will receive the information described in 2 (above) and make it available, in a suitable form, to its own students.

5. The home university will receive application forms from its own degree students and:

   (a) determine, in accordance with the specific requirements of the host institution and after any necessary consultation with it, whether the student has the prerequisite qualifications for enrolment in the unit or units he or she desires and has not already passed an overlapping course unit;

   (b) determine whether the enrolment is consistent with its own regulations, degree requirements, etc.;

(c) decide what ungraded credit in a form appropriate to the student's progress towards his degree will be awarded for successful completion of the unit;

(d) fill its quota for each unit from among qualified (see (a) and (b)) applicants, and, where necessary, seek to increase its quota by using places not filled by other institutions and advise host institutions of unfilled quota places for redistribution; and

(e) transmit enrolment materials to the host institution.

6. The home university will advise host institutions of enrolment variations, including withdrawals and changes of address, in so far as these changes affect the activities and/or records of host institutions.

Role of the Student

7. Any student who has successfully completed units at their home institution may seek to enrol for a cross-credited unit via the home university.

8. Upon enrolment approval by the home university and confirmation of enrolment by the host university the student will undertake the unit or units, and communicate directly and exclusively with the host on all academic, teaching, library, etc, matters concerning that unit or units.

General

9. Each university shall appoint a co-ordinator who will prepare information on the program, dispatch/receive all inter-university communication concerning the program, and answer enquiries about the program.

10. A project co-ordinating committee shall meet at least once a year, and communicate more frequently, to assess the progress of the cross-crediting program, to monitor inter-university enrolments, and to deal with issues and problems as they arise.

11. The institutions concerned hope that, in addition to its primary purpose of providing increased opportunities for students, the cross-crediting program will lead to generally enhanced communication and co-operation amongst the participants.

NOTES TO ACCOMPANY THE MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT ON CROSS-ENROLMENT

In the interests of brevity and future flexibility, the memorandum does not deal with administrative details or the philosophies and expectations of the participants. These notes may be easily altered at any time in accordance with the then current circumstances and understanding of the participants.

General Notes

The memorandum covers only those areas in which the participating institutions must act collectively and/or in one another's interests. Internal matters, including the relationship between a university and its degree students, are matters for individual decision; it is understood that no institution will seek to discourage its students from participating in the program.

No precise estimates of the number of participants or of the likelihood of a fiscal and numerical "balance of trade" among institutions can be made in advance. As EFTSUs are calculated on the basis of course unit enrolments, there should be little technical difficulty in accounting for incoming and outgoing students. As to the risk of an imbalance of trade (i.e. a reduction in some institutions of the course unit enrolments for which EFTSU funds can be claimed) the institutions have expressed their willingness to risk this, and to bear any short term costs. In fact they do not expect any great imbalance, though balance may not be achieved on an annual basis. The program will be closely monitored; should imbalances prove to be the norm, changes in funding arrangements may be required; however, transfers of funds between institutions would not be a satisfactory solution. Each institution will inform the others of the likelihood of any peculiarly substantial demand being made by its home students for particular courses offered elsewhere.

Note to Clause One of the Memorandum

For 1986 the following quotas will be applied on an experimental basis:

1. Restricted (for small enrolment courses or those few which are very heavily subscribed):

   2 places x 4 home institutions = 8

2. Standard: 5 places x 4 home institutions = 20

   These numbers are minima which institutions are obliged to provide; they may be exceeded at the hosts' discretion.

Note to Clause Two of the Memorandum

The institutions will, as soon as possible, agree to deadlines for initial enrolments and final decisions regarding cross enrolments.

Note to Clause Five of the Memorandum

(b) The essential concerns here are that the proposed course unit forms an appropriate part of the candidate's degree course, and that it does not include a substantial amount of work for which the candidate has already received credit.

(c) The host institution will assess the performance of the cross enrolled student in its usual manner and award a grade in its usual form. The home institution will agree to award ungraded "pass" credit to its students who have successfully completed course units at host institutions, in an amount equal to the fraction of the host institution's total degree requirements represented by that unit. (The home institution may, of course, agree with its own degree student on a translation of the host grade into an equivalent home grade.)

Note to Clause Ten of the Memorandum

For reasons of administrative efficiency the committee might include the Directors of External Studies at Queensland, New England, Murdoch, and Macquarie and the Registrar of Deakin. Academic and other administrative inputs must be assured either through representation on the committee or through easy and regular access to it.

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF AREAS OF STUDY FROM WHICH COURSE UNITS WOULD BE SELECTED UNDER THE CROSS ENROLMENT AGREEMENT

SHOWING COMPLETE MAJORS (*) AND INCOMPLETE MAJORS (+)

MAJORS	DEAKIN	MACQUARIE	MURDOCH	UNE	Q'LAND
Agricultural Studies				*	
Anthropology and Sociology	*		*	*	
Behavioural Sciences	*	+		*	
Biological Sciences		*		*	
Chemistry		*			
Classical Studies				*	+
Computer Science					+
Creative Arts	*			*	
Economics & Finance		+		*	*
Education	*	*	*	*	*
Environmental Sciences		*	*	*	*
History, Philosophy, Politics	*	+		*	*
Literature	*		*	*	*
Maths and Physics		*	*	*	*
Modern Languages		*		*	*